School Ethics Commission Meeting Public Session Minutes

May 19, 2020

Chairperson Robert Bender called the meeting of the School Ethics Commission (Commission) to order at 9:35 a.m.

Notice of the meeting was provided to the State House Press Corps and the Secretary of State and filed as required by the Open Public Meetings Act.

I. Roll Call

Roll Call	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Present	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
Absent								0

Also in attendance were Kathryn Whalen, Director, Offices of School Ethics and Compliance, staff member Jeannine Pizzigoni, and Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Jaclyn Frey. Everyone in attendance at the meeting participated via telephone due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

II. First Public Comment

At the start of the meeting, Director Whalen explained to the public (who also accessed the meeting by telephone due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic) how the meeting would be conducted. More specifically, it was explained that the public would be afforded the opportunity to provide public comment regarding his/her case; the Commission would then adjourn to executive session (on a different conference line); the Commission would return to public at approximately 12:00 p.m.; at that time, members of the public would be afforded another opportunity to provide public comment in connection with his/her case; and then the Commission would vote on matters pertinent to its business.

9:36 a.m. Regina Discenza, the named Respondent in C75-19, and the named Complainant in C04-20, noted her attendance, and wanted to verify that the Commission received the memo that she submitted to the Commission's staff. Ms. Discenza also informed the Commission that she would be happy to answer any questions from the Commission. Finally, Ms. Discenza asked if there was a vacancy on the Commission and, if so, how it could be filled. As to this latter question, Ms. Discenza was referred to the Office of the Governor.

No other member of the public appeared and/or offered public comments.

III. Executive Session

At **9:41 a.m.**, the following **Resolution** was read:

Whereas, the Open Public Meetings Act (*N.J.S.A.* 10:4-6 *et seq.*) authorizes the Commission, a public body, to meet in Executive Session under certain circumstances; and

Whereas, the Open Public Meetings Act requires that the Commission adopt a Resolution at a public meeting to go into Executive Session; and

Now therefore be it resolved that, consistent with the provisions of N.J.A.C. 10:4-12(b), the Commission will adjourn to executive session to discuss matters which, by statute, are regarded as confidential and also to discuss matters possibly involving litigation, specifically: C72-18; C54-19; C59-19; C07-20; C11-20; C14-20; C09-19; C72-19; C73-19 and C02-20 (Consolidated); C75-19; C04-20; T12-19; T14-19 through T19-19; T21-19 through T31-19, and T33-19; A10-20; A11-20; T13-19; T20-19; T32-19; discussion regarding communication from the Cumberland County Office of Education; review of correspondence in connection with C10-20; nominating committee to present name of nominee for Chairperson for July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021; and adoption of resolution setting forth 2021 Commission meeting dates/times; and

Now therefore be it further resolved that the Commission will return to open session to conduct business at the conclusion of Executive Session.

Motion was made by Jude Tanella, and seconded by Richard Tomko, to adjourn to Executive Session to discuss the matters set forth in the foregoing Resolution.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
No								0
Abstention								0

IV. Return to Public/Second Public Comment

At **12:18 p.m.**, a motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Richard Tomko, to return to public session for the purpose of receiving public comment/testimony.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
No								0
Abstention								0

12:20 p.m. Regina Discenza, the named Respondent in C75-19, and the named Complainant in C04-20, again noted her attendance, and asked how she could obtain a copy of the Commission's minutes, and asked when she would receive a copy of the decisions in the matters docketed before the Commission. As to the former question, Ms. Discenza was provided with information on submitting an Open Public Records Act request. As to the latter question, Ms. Discenza was advised that the decisions would be sent, electronically, before the close of business on May 19, 2020.

12:22 p.m. Gavin Rozzi, the named Complainant in C73-19, noted his attendance, but did not offer any public statements or comments.

V. Complaints to Review

C72-18 Motion was made by Michael Carucci, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
No								0
Abstention								0

C54-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Mark Finkelstein, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
No								0
Abstention								0

C59-19 Motion was made by Richard Tomko, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
No								0
Abstention								0

C07-20 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Richard Tomko, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote		Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
No								0
Abstention								0

C11-20 Motion was made by Jude Tanella, and seconded by Mark Finkelstein, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
No								0
Abstention								0

C14-20 Motion was made by Richard Tomko, and seconded by Michael Carucci, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
No								0
Abstention								0

VI. Decisions to Adopt as Written

C09-19 Motion was made by Richard Tomko, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as revised.

Vote

Vote		Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

C72-19 Motion was made by Richard Tomko, and seconded by Mark Finkelstein, to adopt the decision as revised.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X			X	X	X	X	5
No			X					1
Abstention		X						1

Commissioner Collins issued the following statement with regard to his "No" vote: With due respect to my colleagues, I have legal concerns about this proposed modified decision, which I want to explain in order to explain my vote. Specifically, this decision finds that the complaint contains probable cause because the respondent failed to provide a "disclaimer" in his comments that he was not speaking in his capacity as a school board member. I have serious concerns about the constitutionality and legality of the Commission's continued application of the School Ethics Act to require that individual school board members affirmatively provide a "disclaimer" as part of their political speech. I believe this standard is neither supported by the text of the Act nor narrowly tailored to a compelling government interest in order to satisfy the First Amendment. This concern of mine has been long-held, goes beyond this specific case, and has nothing to do with the content of the speech at issue in this case. In the end, because this opinion continues to apply the "disclaimer" requirement without any limiting language on the present legal and constitutional concerns, I am constrained to vote no.

C73-19 and C02-20 (Consolidated) Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

C75-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Richard Tomko, to adopt the decision as revised.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

C04-20 Motion was made by Jude Tanella, and seconded by Richard Tomko, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

Orders to Show Cause

T12-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T14-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to administratively dismiss the matter.

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T15-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

Vote				Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T16-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote		Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T17-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T18-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

Vote				Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T19-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote		Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T21-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T22-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T23-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to administratively dismiss the matter.

Vote		Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T24-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T25-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T26-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote		Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T27-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T28-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T29-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote		Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T30-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T31-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender			Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

T33-19 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Jude Tanella, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote		Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

VII. Advisory Opinions

A10-20 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Richard Tomko, to draft the advisory opinion as discussed.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
No								0
Abstention								0

A11-20 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Richard Tomko, to draft the advisory opinion as discussed.

Vote

Vote		Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
No								0
Abstention								0

VIII. Administrative Dismissals

- T13-19 This matter was on the agenda for informational purposes only.
- **T20-19** This matter was on the agenda for informational purposes only.
- T32-19 This matter was on the agenda for informational purposes only.

IX. Other Business

Discussion regarding communication from the Cumberland County Office of Education This matter was on the agenda for informational purposes only.

C10-20 A motion was made by Jude Tanella, and seconded by Richard Tomko to draft correspondence informing the parties this matter will continue to be held in abeyance despite Complainants' request.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
No								0
Abstention								0

Nominating committee (3 persons) to present name of nominee for Chairperson (July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021). Motion was made by Mark Finkelstein, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to nominate Robert Bender as Chairperson.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci	Michael Collins	Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
No								0
Abstention								0

Vote to adopt Resolution setting forth 2021 Commission meeting dates/times. Motion was made by Michael Carucci, and seconded by Jude Tanella to adopt the resolution as drafted.

Vote

Vote		Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
No								0
Abstention					·			0

X. Minutes

Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Richard Tomko, to adopt the minutes of the meeting (public and executive) conducted on April 21, 2020, as written.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender	Michael Carucci		Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
No								0
Abstention		X						1

XI. Adjournment

At 12:36 p.m., a motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Richard Tomko, to adjourn.

Vote

Vote	Robert Bender			Mark Finkelstein	Dennis Roberts	Jude A. Tanella	Richard Tomko	Total
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
No								0
Abstention								0

Submitted by:	
Jeannine Pizzigoni	
Approved by:	
Kathryn A. Whalen, Director	